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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000064

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STATE FOR EB/TPP/ABB THOMAS LERSTEN AND MATTHEW KOCH

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [TBIO](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA BIOTECH OUTREACH STRATEGY PROPOSAL

REF: STATE 202514

**¶1.** US Embassy Bratislava proposes two core projects to promote friendly biotechnology public policy and increased usage of GM seeds by Slovak farmers. The first project, to be held in April, focuses on strengthening GM-friendly elements in Slovakia and providing a space in which they can share their message with key regulators and policymakers. The second project, to be held in September, focuses on farmers' future marketing opportunities for GM corn. Proposals are outlined below as per reftel guidance.

**¶2.** Project A: Biotechnology conference/Outreach to Public Officials and Media

- Projected Cost: USD 20,000

- Target Audience: Approximately 80 pro-GM agronomists, scientists, and farmers (mostly from Slovakia, but also from Hungary, Czech Republic, and Austria) will be attending the Pannonian Plant Biotechnology Association conference in Piestany, hosted by the Slovak Agricultural Research Center. The conference is titled "Plant Biotechnology as a Tool for Development in Agriculture." Our project would add a public outreach component to this conference, including field visits, multimedia presentations, and a reception on April **¶17**. Key invitees for these events include top officials at the Ministries of Environment and Agriculture, leading Members of Parliament, consumer advocates, and mainstream media representatives.

- Issue Focus: Conference events will be designed to help Slovak and Central European experts inform key policymakers about the benefits of biotechnology for farmers and consumers, with a particular focus on public health, crop yields, and research potential.

- Purpose and Impact: The project is designed primarily to facilitate communication between local pro-GM experts and the Slovak government. It is also designed to widen communication beyond agricultural news outlets to include mainstream news sources. Since Slovakia changed governments in mid-2006, the GOS has taken an increasingly negative view of biotechnology, as evidenced by its December 2006 vote in the EU to support Austria's ban on MON 810 corn, and its stringent January 2007 regulations on planting GM corn. Contact between civil society and top Ministry officials has become very limited, resulting in a lack of GOS knowledge about biotechnology, and policy decisions that consequently follow majority EU opinion. The event would mark the first instance in which the State Secretaries at the Ministries of Environment and Agriculture -- who largely determine Slovak biotech policy at the EU and national level, respectively -- will have traveled outside the capital to learn about biotechnology. Conference events will follow up on a planned

March dinner at the Ambassador's residence focusing on biotechnology policy.

- Length: Two days, April 17-18 2007.
- Point of Contact: James Potts, Economic Officer (pottsjh@state.gov).

**13. Project B: Biotechnology Conference II/GM Marketing Opportunities for Farmers**

- Projected Cost: USD 15,000
- Target Audience: We will partner with the Slovak Agricultural Chamber (SPPK) to host a conference in Slovakia's south-central grain belt. 80 farmers would attend, along with representatives from seed companies (including Monsanto and Pioneer), local ethanol processors, and local media representatives.
- Issue Focus: This trade conference will focus on potential for Slovak farmers to grow and successfully market GM corn in 2008. Monsanto and Pioneer are Slovakia's primary GM seed providers.
- Purpose and Impact: The one-day conference will focus on marketing opportunities for Slovak farmers wishing to plant GM corn in 2008. 2008 has the potential to be the first year for widespread GM planting in Slovakia. In 2007, the first year in which GM corn can be commercially grown in Slovakia, planting is expected to be no more than 1,000 hectares due to a ban on GM-products for human consumption and a lack of local market opportunities for biofuels. Slovakia's first major corn-based fuel processing plant is scheduled for completion in late 2007, however, which significantly

BRATISLAVA 00000064 002 OF 002

brightens the outlook for the following year. Farmers will still have concerns about switching production methods, however, which we hope to address in this conference. As a key part of the project, US farm leaders and biofuels processors would travel to Slovakia to share their experience with GM corn and its use in biofuels. The project would also help with preparation of conference-related educational materials.

- Length: One day, September 2007
- Point of Contact: James Potts, Economic Officer (pottsjh@state.gov)

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